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ABSTRACT

Reality shock within organizations can be defined as the discrepancy between an individual's expectations established prior to joining an organization and the individual's perceptions after becoming a member of the organization. To investigate the effects of reality shock on organizational commitment, 109 bank tellers were monitored for 10 months after being hired. The subjects completed a modified version of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) upon entering the teller program and again after 2 months, when they also completed the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. After 2 months, branch managers evaluated the tellers' performance according to attendance, punctuality, number of customers served, and error rate. An analysis of the results showed that new employees definitely experienced reality shock as their initial expectations were lowered by work experience. The tellers' perceptions of the job and career facilitation were significantly reduced over the first 8 weeks in the organization. Reality shock significantly influenced tellers' commitment attitudes and desire to remain with the organization. However, reality shock had little or no effect on employees' quantity or quality of performance or on turnover. (BL)

Reality Shock and Commitment: A Study of New Employees' Expectations

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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal, field experiment was conducted to assess the effects of reality shock on organizational commitment. Reality shock is defined as the discrepancy between an individual's expectations established prior to joining an organization, and the individual's perceptions after becoming a member of the organization. The N = 109 bank tellers who were hired during the study were monitored for 10 months after entry into the bank. Reality shock clearly and significantly influenced the commitment attitudes and desire to remain of the tellers. However, reality shock was found to have little or no effect on the actual behavior of the employees.

Reality Shock and Commitment: A Study of New Employees' Expectations

Prior to joining an organization, an individual has formed an impression of what the organization expects from its members, and has some idea of what the members can expect from the organization. Reality shock is defined as the discrepancy between the individual's expectations established prior to joining the organization, and the individual's perceptions after becoming a member of the organization.

Recent research has focused on the role of the organization in influencing these expectations. Porter, Lawler & Hackman (1975) identify the problems in the recruitment and selection processes where both the organization and the individual feel a need to look attractive to the other, thus increasing the possibility of biasing the information exchanged. Weitz (1956) demonstrated that if an organization presented realistic information to job candidates, voluntary turnover would be reduced, without making it more difficult to attract job candidates. Since Weitz's original research, Realistic Job Previews (RJP's) have been used in a variety of settings to affect voluntary turnover (Gomersall & Myers, 1966; Horner, 1979; Ilgen & Dugoni, 1977; Wanous, 1973; Youngberg, 1963).

Although RJP's have been found to affect voluntary turnover, little research has been done as to why the effect occurs. The most commonly accepted explanation, proposed by Porter & Steers (1973), and Wanous (1973,1976,1980), has been the "met expectations" hypothesis. This hypothesis argues that RJP's lower initial expectations, and that these lower expectations are more easily met on the job than higher ones. As a result, people holding lower expectations would be more satisfied, and thus have a lower level of voluntary turnover. In a study to investigate the causes for the effects of RJP's on voluntary turnover, Dugoni & Ilgen (1981) were unable to find support for the met expectations hypothesis.

The purpose of the present research was to investigate the effect of a

new employee's expectations, irrespective of their source. It was recognized that the source of expectations is much broader than the recruitment and selection processes. For example, Van Maanen (1976) notes the effect of societal stereotypes on the expectations of police recruits. Fox (1957) and Miller & Wager (1971) describe the effect of graduate and professional schools in moulding the expectations of students. In addition, the new employee will have received information about the job and the organization from friends, present or past employees, customers, family, etc.

This study investigates the effect of reality shock that occurs when initial expectations are not met. Two hypotheses are tested:

1. New employees entering organizations have expectations that are not confirmed by work experience. The employee's expectations, measured after the individual has become a member of the organization will be lower than the expectations measured at point of entry.
2. An individual's commitment to an organization (as determined by measuring the employee's attitudes, and commitment-related behaviors) is inversely proportional to the extent of the reality shock experienced when expectations are lowered by work experience. That is, commitment will be reduced to the extent that expectations are not met.

METHOD

Research Site and Subjects

This study was conducted entirely within a single organization, a large bank. In addition to banking facilities at the Main office, the Bank operates more than 100 branches throughout the surrounding metropolitan area. At the commencement of the study, a total of 1,454 tellers were employed, of which 851 were hourly (or part-time) tellers. Since almost all newly hired tellers

commence as hourly tellers, and since the annual turnover rate in 1979 for hourly tellers was 45%, it was this segment of the teller population that was included in the study.

Of the 227 tellers who were hired during the duration of the study, 174 or 77% were still employed as tellers after two months. Of these, 109 or 63% returned a follow up questionnaire. It was these 109 tellers who were included in this study.

Procedure

All newly hired tellers reported to the Bank's Main Office on their first day of employment for an orientation session. After orientation, the new employees spent three weeks in a training program at a central location before commencing work in an assigned branch. A questionnaire was administered to the newly hired tellers on their first day in the organization prior to the orientation session. This questionnaire was administered by university personnel who promised anonymity. A second questionnaire was mailed to these same tellers two months after they entered the organization. These questionnaires were mailed to the tellers, who were instructed to return them by mail to the university. A performance appraisal was completed by the teller's branch manager after two months.

Measurement

This research was preceeded by a diagnostic study which identified the expectations that were most likely to be inflated (see Dean, 1981). Two questionnaires were used to measure these expectations.

<u>Initial Expectations</u> - Questionnaire #1 measured the expectations of the new employees. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was included in this questionnaire to measure job content and job context expectations. The JDI and its scoring techniques are described in Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969). To measure the new tellers' expectations, the instructions of the JDI were reworded. The

tellers were asked to indicate if the adjective described what they realistically expected the job to be like. Questionnaire #1 also included eight items, adapted from Schneider & Dachler (1978) to measure the tellers perceptions of organizational career facilitation. Tellers were instructed to indicate the degree of accuracy of each statement as to how they expect the Bank will help them achieve their career goals. The reliability (coefficient alpha) of this scale was .71.

Perceived Reality - Questionnaire #2 asked the tellers to describe their job after two months employment in the Bank, (after three weeks in teller training and five weeks working in a branch). The JDI was again used to measure the tellers' job content and job context perceptions. The eight organizational career facilitation items were used to measure career facilitation perceptions.

Reality Shock - Reality shock was measured by calculating the difference between the newcomer's expectations prior to entering the organization (Questionnaire #1), and the employee's description of work experiences after two months in the organization (Questionnaire #2). Thus reality shock is a measure of the changes that occured in the teller's perceptions over a two month period.

Commitment Measures - The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (developed by Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974) was administered eight weeks after the tellers joined the Bank. The OCQ has been used extensively and appears to be an excellent measure of organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). The instrument combines attitudes and behavioral intentions. Empicically these two aspects of commitment are sufficiently highly correlated to justify this sort of aggregate index of commitment. In thes study, the reliability (coeficient alpha) for the OCQ was .83. An an additional measure of commitment, three items were included in Questionnaire #2 to measure the tellers desire to remain working at the Bank. The reliability (coefficient alpha) of the scale was .71.

Behavioral Measures - Eight weeks after the tellers joined the organization, their respective branch managers provided performance data for the new tellers. These data included the number of days scheduled to work, days absent, days late,number of customers served, and number of errors. These data were used to calculate quantity and quality of production, punctuality, and attendance during the teller's first two months in the organization. In addition, turnover data were collected after ten months.

RESULTS

Reality Shock

As predicted, new employees experienced reality shock as their initial expectations were lowered by work experience. Table 1 lists the initial expectations of the tellers at the beginning of their first day in the organization, their perceptions of the same dimensions eight weeks later, and the change in perceptions (reality shock). On five of the six dimensions, the tellers' perceptions of the job and career facititation were significantly reduced over the first eight weeks in the organization.

Outcomes of Reality Shock

The rationale behind the reality shock hypothesis was that new employees with realistic expectations would experience minimal reality shock and, therefore be more committed to the organization. Similarly, the met expectations hypothesis with regard to RJP's suggest that lowered expectations should be more easily met and, therefore, more satisfying (Dugoni & Ilgen, 1981). To test this hypothesis, initial expectations and reality shock were correlated with scores on the OCQ, the desire to remain scale, and the various performance measures. To avoid the problems associated with difference scores, the relationship between reality shock and the various outcomes was tested using partial correlations, controlling for initial expectations.

Commitment and Desire to Remain - Table 2 presents the data relevant to the effects of reality shock on commitment and the desire to remain. It is apparent from these data that reality shock on each of the five JDI dimensions and on the career facilitation scale reliably predict organizational commitment and the desire to remain.

Behavioral Outcomes - Reality shock was found to have little or no significant effect on the behaviors of the new employees. The only significant correlations were on the pay dimension, which was correlated with punctuality ($r=-.19$, $p<.05$), and attendance ($r=-.24$, $p<.05$). No correlations were found between reality shock and quantity of performance, quality of performance, or turnover.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to test two related hypotheses. First, it was proposed that new employees enter an organization with inflated expectations. Reality shock was defined as the difference between these initial expectations and what was actually perceived to be reality after experience in the organization. Consistent support was found for this hypothesis.

Initial expectations on five dimensions (the work itself, pay, promotions, co-workers, and career facilitation) were significantly inflated as compared with perceptions of these same dimensions after eight weeks employment. This indicates that bank tellers have been socialized, prior to joining the Bank, to expect a higher degree of satisfaction with these aspects of the job than they actually experience. The only exception was with regard to supervision. Tellers reported greater satisfaction with their supervisors than they had initially expected.

The second hypothesis tested in this study concerned the impact of reality shock on organizational commitment. Commitment was determined by using the OCQ, and the desire to remain items, and by measuring the behaviors of the new employees. The results indicate that reality shock has a greater impact on

attitudes and intentions than on behaviors.

Reality shock was found to have a major, negative impact on commitment attitudes as measured by the OCQ, and by the employee's desire to remain working at the Bank. This indicates that inflated initial expectations have a negative influence on an employee's attachment to the organization.

In contrast, reality shock was found to have little or no effect on the commitment-oriented behaviors of the tellers. There were only small and non-significant correlations between reality shock and job performance. This is typical of previous, related research that found no relationship between RJP's and job performance. Similarly, little or no significant relationships were found between reality shock and attendance, punctuality, job survival, and job tenure. This was despite the strong relationships found between reality shock and the desire to remain. One factor that may have minimized the reality shock-participation linkage was the local labor market. Alternate job opportunities dropped during the entire course of this two year study. For example: at the commencement of the study, the Bank was hiring an average of 50 new tellers a month, but at its conclusion, this rate had dropped by more than half. This, in effect, influenced the decision to participate, making it difficult to observe the influence of reality shock.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings reported here suggest the importance of initial job expectations in influencing the organizational commitment of newly hired employees. In practical terms, these findings suggest two strategies for building the organizational commitment of new employees. First, realistic job previews have been suggested as one technique for establishing realistic expectations of job candidates (see Wanous, 1980). A second strategy would be to develop selection tests to screen out job applicants with unrealistic expectations.

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TABLE 1

Expectations and Perceptions[a]

Dimension	Initial Expectations (T1) $\overline{X}$	SD	Perceptions at 8 Weeks (T2) $\overline{X}$	SD	Reality Shock (T1-T2) $\overline{X}$	SD	Significance[b] t
Work Itself	38.03	6.94	35.48	8.38	2.55	7.94	3.20***
Pay	18.72	4.51	14.97	5.93	3.75	5.57	6.61***
Promotions	19.84	5.96	14.86	6.72	4.98	6.63	7.76***
Supervision	42.25	5.77	44.47	8.11	-2.22	9.13	-2.50**
Co-Workers	47.41	6.55	44.29	8.19	3.12	8.70	3.64***
Career Facilitation	3.93	.93	3.41	.85	.52	1.10	4.89***

a. n = 109

b. paired T-Test, T1 with T2

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

TABLE 2

Correlations of Initial Expectations and Reality Shock with Commitment[a]

	Initial Expectations (T1)		Reality Shock (T1 - T2)		Reality Shock Controlling for T1[b]	
	OCQ	Desire to Remain	OCQ	Desire to Remain	OCQ	Desire to Remain
Work Itself	.18*	.28**	-.32***	-.44***	-.38***	-.52***
Pay	.35***	.37***	-.26**	-.21*	-.42***	-.35***
Promotions	.23**	.28***	-.16*	-.01	-.21*	-.15
Supervision	.11	-.04	-.33***	-.33***	-.52***	-.37***
Co-Workers	.15	.08	-.34***	-.22**	-.44***	-.29**
Career Facilitation	.10	.16*	-.22**	-.18*	-.43***	-.37***

a n = 109

b Partial correlations removed the variance due to initial expectations

* = p <.05

** = p <.01

*** = p < 001